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ABSTRACT

The lives and places in society of urban youth at risk of dropping out of the Los Angeles (California) Unified School District schools are explored through interviews of adolescents whom the author met when doing field work in Los Angeles County. Data come from interviews conducted in the course of the 1991 Drug Use Forecasting Study (DUF) and the Sex-for-Crack study. Of the DUF sample, 394 were male and 44 female, with almost 60 percent Latinos and about 22 percent African Americans. Additional and more qualitative interviews were conducted with 123 of this sample. The Sex-for-Crack sample interviewed 40 dependent crack users in 8 cities in 1989-91. From these subjects, four social types of youth at risk for dropping out are identified: (1) gang members; (2) young parents; (3) substance abusers; and (4) youth from dysfunctional homes. The characteristics and problems of each group are explored. The different types of youth have different needs at different levels of potential intervention. Gang members, out of alienation from society, have created societies of their own. Teen sexuality must be addressed, and youth abusing drugs and alcohol need more realistic education at earlier ages. Child abuse is a dramatic example of the recurrent problems of dysfunctional families that must be addressed in multiple ways. Feelings of alienation from school can only be relieved when students and their parents feel less alienated from society. (SLD)

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School's a Rough Place: Youth Gangs, Drug Users, and Family Life in Los Angeles

Kathleen Boyle

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SCHOOL'S A ROUGH PLACE:
YOUTH GANGS, DRUG USERS, AND FAMILY LIFE IN LOS ANGELES

Kathleen Boyle

Introduction

Among various current crises in modern education is the shockingly high number of youth who do not finish high school and who are unprepared to participate in a technological society. This social problem is comprised of a web of interrelated components and many are addressed in this volume. The most important component of this chapter consists of the subjective evaluations by youth themselves on their lives and their place in the structure of society.

In talking to and interviewing Los Angeles area adolescents and adults in institutional settings about their lives and concerns, I became aware that school has had a different meaning for them than the socially intended meaning. "School"--the institution, the building, the culture and the environment--has come to represent to them an oppressive or, at least, uncaring, component of a society that does not work in their best interests. Although there is a respect for the idea of "getting an education," it is more difficult for them to think of reasons to stay in school than to drop out.

This chapter is not a definitive study of dropping out

of school or of those at risk for dropping out. There are categories of at-risk youth not mentioned here. Furthermore, the people I interviewed were all in institutional settings and perhaps represent an extreme portion of the population. I have focused on the inner worlds and perceptions of four categories of adolescents I met when I did field work in juvenile halls in Los Angeles County: gang members, young parents, drug users, and youth from dysfunctional homes. Most of the data for this chapter derive from those interviews. In addition, I have included relevant retrospective perceptions of adults of the same four categories who were interviewed in jails, housing projects, and homeless shelters in Los Angeles County. Their memories of their youth provided an often frightening perspective from which to view the current realities of the juveniles. A view of the environment of these adolescents and adults and their attitudes toward school may provide insight for those who are developing and implementing out-reach programs to decrease school dropout rates and promote academic achievement. The voices, the experiences, and the pain of these young people are the heart of this report.

Background

The Los Angeles Unified School District, as of October, 1990, has an enrollment of 625,461 K-12 students, making it the nation's second largest school district after New York City. LA Unified's 842 schools and centers are attended by 12.8 percent of all students enrolled in California public elementary and secondary schools. The Los Angeles district covers an area of 552 square miles, representing 28 cities in Los Angeles County in addition to the city of Los Angeles.

The district has an average dropout rate of 16.3 percent for senior high schools, with differences between high schools ranging from 6.2 percent to 40.3 percent. Dropouts are calculated from "Fall No Show," "Long Term Absentee at end of school year," and "Leaver with no request for records" statistics.

The ethnic make-up of the district and the dropout rate of the different groups for grades 10 through 12 are as follows: 64 percent are Latino (with a dropout rate of 59 percent, 15 percent are African-American (dropout rate 21 percent), 14 percent are white (dropout rate 13 percent), 5 percent are Asian (dropout rate 4 percent), 2 percent are Filipino (dropout rate 1 percent), .4 percent are Pacific Islander (dropout rate .4 percent), and .3 percent are American Indian/Alaskan Native (dropout rate .3 percent).

Data Collection

Data for this report were originally collected for the on-going Drug Use Forecasting (DUF) study and the now completed Sex-for-Crack study.

The DUF study of drug use among adult and juvenile detainees, funded by the National Institute of Justice, is conducted in many cities throughout the United States. Data are collected in quarterly cycles in four selected jails and all three juvenile halls in Los Angeles County. The study is largely epidemiological and involves a pencil-and-paper questionnaire and a urine sample collection to verify reported drug use.

For the DUF study, interviewers approach subjects who have been arrested (adults) or detained (minors) shortly after they have been booked into a jail or a juvenile hall to explain the content of the study, its voluntary nature, and its complete confidentiality and anonymity. Adults are offered a candy bar and cigarette for participating. Minors are offered a granola bar, peanuts, or fruit snack, since county provisions do not allow for high-sugar content foods in juvenile halls. An average of 98 percent of adults and 99 percent of juveniles have agreed to participate in the quarterly study. The concordance rate between self-reported drug use and confirmations from urine samples has been high:

between 80 to 95 percent, depending on the drug in question. Epidemiological data on juveniles contained in this chapter were gathered in 1991 by several interviewers including myself using structured interviews with a sample of 438 juveniles in three juvenile halls. The makeup of this sample was as follows: 394 (89.9 percent) were males and 44 (10 percent) were females. There were 261 Latinos (59.6 percent), 98 African-American (22.4 percent), 59 whites (13.5 percent), and 18 "other" (5 percent).

I personally interviewed 123 of this sample and conducted more in-depth, qualitative interviews with them after the structured interview, when time permitted. In this group, 80 (65 percent) were Latino, 28 (22.8 percent) were African-American, 11 (89.9 percent) were white, and 4 (3.3 percent) were "other."

The Sex-for-Crack study, conducted in eight cities in 1989-1991, was funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and coordinated by Birch and Davis, Inc. This qualitative study of 40 dependent crack users who exchange sex for crack utilized a more qualitative approach and involved observation at crack using areas as well as unstructured, taped interviews. Much interview time focused on the early life and experiences of the crack users; they reflected on their childhoods, school years and attitudes

toward school. Some of this material appears in this chapter.

In the course of interviewing adults and juveniles on both projects, I became aware of some underlying themes in their lives and perspectives. Patterns began emerging, and similarities and differences between different subgroups became apparent.

Social Types of At-Risk Youth

From these subjects, four social types of youth who are at risk for dropping out of school were identified: gang participants, young parents, substance abusers, and youth from dysfunctional homes. Obviously there is overlap among the groups, yet there are some differences that make each sub-group unique.

1. Gang Members

> I'm too busy to go to school (a 14 year-old gang member).

Gang activity with its attendant violence and crime has become a topic of intense media interest. Evidence exists that gang members, called "gang bangers" by press, police

and by the gangs themselves, have been responsible for drug distribution, especially crack cocaine, and for "gang banging." This term does not have a sexual connotation for gang members. Rather it includes the various forms of gang activities that members engage in to protect turf and defend honor. Gang banging ranges from name calling to homicide and includes the ever-growing numbers of drive-by shootings which have become an all-too-common fact of life in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department has 78,233 gang members on record with 59 percent being Latino and 39 percent African-American (Walker, 1990). The gang members belong to an estimated 700 gangs and committed approximately 450 gang-related homicides in 1989 (Morales, 1990), and more in subsequent years. Asian gang members account for 2 percent with 1,540 members, and 72 white gang members have been recorded. Estimated conservatively, for both Latino and African-American youth ages 15-24 the homicide rate is 600/100,000 (Morales, 1990).

The areas which are home to the gangs are poor; inhabitants typically have low-income jobs or are receiving public assistance. The various neighborhoods are fairly homogeneous ethnically. Although inter-ethnic gang fighting occurs, the majority of the violence seems to occur in same-ethnic skirmishes. In this chapter I am reporting on

interviews conducted only with Latino and African-American current and former gang members; no Asian or white gang members were newly detained at times I was collecting data in juvenile halls.

Latino gang members.

> I was born in the gang. My father was in the gang and my uncles were in the gang (15-year-old gang member).

Fierce loyalty seems to be the essential motivating force behind Latino gang activity. The Latino gang members I interviewed were all Mexican-American, "Chicano." Loyalty to the gang itself, loyalty to the neighborhood (the 'hood) which the gang represents and defends, and loyalty to family members are values which become life and death issues on a daily basis. The prevailing credo is one of honor and respect. It is dishonor and disrespect that can lead to fatal consequences, often in drive-by shootings that may claim nongang bystanders. The gang is an irresistible force for the youth of a neighborhood and membership becomes all-involving.

> I don't want to go on drive-bys, but what can you do

> when your homeys are saying, 'You got to defend the 'hood' (a 15-year-old gang member).

Membership in a gang is almost a birthright; active participation is a matter of choice. Boys (girls are discussed below) usually begin participation by hanging out around uncles, older brothers or other family members. When boys decide they want to become active members, they are initiated into the gang by a process called "jumping": several gang members attack the initiate who proves his valor by fighting well and not showing fear. Those who do not want to be active seem to be accepted in the neighborhood; in a large family, various levels of participation may be chosen by different siblings. The period of active participation appears to begin at 11 or 12 years of age and tapers off in the late teens as those members who are still alive and not in jail begin to take on adult role responsibilities and commitments. For most, this means entering the work force in the minimum wage jobs that are still available.

The boys in the gangs, from similar low socioeconomic background, seemed to represent a full range of family backgrounds. Some boys had families that seemed to be stable and functional, with both parents in residence,

siblings, and a full complement of grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. Other boys were from families that seemed dysfunctional: parental substance abuse, absence of one or both parents, physical abuse of children, and youngsters with numerous placements in foster homes.

Once initiated, a member is expected to take part in the activities of the gang which include hanging out with the "homeys" or "homeboys" (fellow members), attending parties and other social events, and avenging incidents of disrespect, which often occur at the parties and other social events. Homeboys value and respect valor and strength in battle, intelligence, social skills, sense of humor, good appearance, and appeal to the opposite sex. The highest status boys seem to be those who present a well-rounded profile of these characteristics. A boy may choose to emphasize certain traits if he feels that he is lacking in others and so create a niche for himself. One of the boys interviewed was not very handsome, was overweight, and admitted that he was not the best fighter. He was obviously intelligent and had a disarming sense of humor; he characterized himself as having a "good personality" and attributed his popularity within the gang and with girls to this trait. Another boy was neither very attractive or intelligent; he was large and strong and claimed to be a

good fighter. He had built his reputation on being a person not to be challenged in battle because he was "crazy," that is, would escalate a fight beyond the normal bounds. He reported that this reputation could be good for maintaining respect but could also work against him by making people, even his homeys, wary of him.

A particular gang may have longstanding vendettas against certain gangs but be fairly neutral with other gangs. A phase of aggression usually starts with an incident of "disrespect" against a gang member or the girlfriend or relative of a gang member. "Disrespect" is shown (or inferred) by words, actions--such as talking to a woman who is the sister or girlfriend of a gang member--or even by a look that is considered to be derogatory. Sometimes, the mere appearance of members of one gang at the party of a rival gang is considered to be disrespectful enough to demand retribution. The pay-back may come in the form of a fight right at the social event, an ambush-like attack at a later time, or, the most extreme, and seemingly very common action, a drive-by shooting.

> I was scared the first time I did a drive-by, but after a while it feels good to shoot a gun (a 14-year-old gang member).

The Los Angeles Juvenile Hall system has the dubious distinction of housing more offenders convicted of homicide than any other juvenile or adult penal institution in the nation. Over 10 percent of detainees in Los Angeles County Juvenile Halls have been convicted of homicide. One reason for this is the high incidence of gang-related drive-by shootings. Drive-bys are the most salient and dangerous of the activities the gangs engage in and the activity that most garners prestige for their members. Conversely, not going on a drive-by would be considered to be a breach of brotherhood. There is an imperative to violent, often fatal, action operating for the gang members that is almost as predetermined as the action movies that may have served as inspiration. While violence toward "innocent bystanders" in most situations is strongly condemned, killing, be it a rival gang member or an innocent bystander in the course of a drive-by, is accepted with equanimity; it is a simple fact of life. There are no alternatives.

> A 15 year-old gang member: I would never steal a car.
> Interviewer: But you're in here (Juvenile Hall) for GTA (Grand Theft--Auto).
> Youngster: Oh, I would <u>use</u> a car to do a drive-by, but I wouldn't <u>steal</u> it.

A drive-by usually begins by three or four gang members stealing a car. Of the boys interviewed, only one reported getting "loaded" on drugs or alcohol during the course of a drive-by; the others said they wanted to be "straight" and would "party" later, when it was completed. When discussing a shooting, the boys always make the same two-handed mimic of firing the automatic weapons they use. There is an informal rotation among the members for the different roles: driver, designated shooter, and ride-alongs. The ride-alongs may be girls. The group enters the neighborhood of the rival gang and approaches the house of the person who had started the incident. If there is no one visible, the house may be sprayed with bullets and that may be a symbolic enough retribution. Usually, the group wants to shoot to kill a particular person but will shoot into a crowd if necessary. Often, bystanders are killed. The shooters leave the scene and the car is then abandoned.

Interviewer: How does it feel to know you killed someone?

Youngster: It feels good, 'cause they deserved it.

Interviewer: What about if it's the wrong person?

Youngster: I did that once. I felt bad, but you know, he shouldn't have come out of his house when he heard

gunshots (a 15-year-old gang member).

The group will then go back to their own neighborhood and celebrate the event, even while anticipating a retribution drive-by aimed at themselves. Alcohol (usually beer), marijuana, and some phencyclidine (PCP) fuel the social activities. There is not much cocaine or crack cocaine use among the Latino gang members. (See section on drugs below). Girls will join in the social events, both girls who are active gang members themselves and other girls who are sisters or girlfriends of members. Some boys reported that they would never force or take advantage of a girl. Others said that as long as she was not the girlfriend or sister of a fellow member, they would take advantage of a girl who was under the influence of alcohol or drugs and therefore unable to protect herself. Sex is considered to be acceptable between an established couple, and almost none of the respondents reported use of protection against disease or pregnancy. When a girlfriend gets pregnant, the boys seem to accept this and start thinking in terms of responsibilities and duty. Although most plan to have a family "someday" or "when I'm in my 20s," fatherhood often comes earlier.

> There's no future in gang-banging (a 16-year-old gang member).

By the age of 16 or 17, most of the boys are beginning to "mature out" of the active phase of gang membership and are thinking of the future. Most have already served time in juvenile hall and are aware that soon enough they will be part of the adult legal system if they continue illegal activities. Many have children already or have a child on the way. All boys interviewed seemed to be aware of the passing of a phase of their youth and the transition to adulthood. Some spoke of lost opportunities to get an education and prepare for the working world. Those who have already worked knew the limited opportunities available to someone without a high school diploma or job skills.

> I go with them (on drive-bys) 'cause they're my homeboys (a 15-year-old girl detained for accessory to homicide).

Most of the girls in a given neighborhood are only passively involved in the activities of the gang, as sisters, girlfriends, and later, mothers of gang members. A few choose to become active participants in the gang and are

initiated in the gang by being "jumped" by other girl members. No girl interviewed reported actually shooting during a drive-by, but all reported riding along on drive-bys, carrying weapons in purses, and fighting with the female members of rival gangs. The girl gang members were similar in socioeconomic background to girls from the same neighborhood who were in juvenile hall but who were not active with the gang. They seemed to differ in family backgrounds. Nonparticipants reported a range of backgrounds, but were most often from functional families. Female gang members interviewed were all from dysfunctional families, had parents who were substance abusers, and had been physically and/or sexually abused. For them the gang represented a safe haven of acceptance and "family", the only they had ever been able to trust. These girls often had boyfriends who were active participants also, but many of the girls' participation seems to be independent of a boyfriend.

> I like school, but I can't go to school on the outs (out of Juvenile Hall). I need the structure (a 16-year-old gang member).

For the Latino gang members, school is not a topic that

emerges naturally; in all cases, the interviewer introduced the topic of school. Since gang activities are primary in members' lives, school seems to be relevant for members to meet each other, exchange weapons, and occasionally, fight with a rival gang member. Many of the interviewees stated that they were aware of the importance of school in their later lives, and that they were probably not doing the best thing for themselves in the long run; but they seemed to view the "future" as a very distant abstract concept that could in no way compete with the immediacy of the life and death relationship with the gang.

The boy quoted above as "liking" school was the only one to report this feeling for school; the others ranged from feelings of "it's OK" to "it doesn't do nothing for me," and even, "I can't relate." For most of those interviewed, the school setting was tied emotionally to the juvenile hall institution setting. Once a minor has been detained for any reason and is put on probation, school attendance becomes a condition of probation. For the gang members, school is often perceived as a penal institution. Conversely, as stated above, the Juvenile Hall setting becomes a place where the gang members can relax since there are no guns and since members of rival gangs are kept separately. For detainees, school becomes an integral part

of the day since there is no choice about attending. Many of those interviewed reported that they took pride in their grades and the positive comments received from teachers in the Juvenile Hall school setting. Furthermore, some saw being detained as the only way they could live through their teen years.

African-American gang members.

> I want to quit gang banging but the money's too good (a 16-year-old gang member).

The African-American gangs are organized somewhat differently than the Latino gangs. There are two large "umbrella" gangs, the Bloods and the Crips, that encompass all the African-American gang activities in Los Angeles. In a general way, there are geographical areas which are governed by local neighborhood gangs that are loyal either to the Bloods or to the Crips. Loyalty to the larger gang involves wearing the "colors" of the gang--red for Bloods and blue for Crips--and participating in battles against common enemies. In reality, the organization is more fluid than could be shown on an organizational chart. A young person in a neighborhood governed by a gang that is loyal to

the Bloods, for example, might have friends or family that adhere to the Crips and so might join a Crips-oriented gang. Similarly, a neighborhood that is located in Crips territory might actually belong to a Bloods-oriented gang. One informant reported a gang that included members who were both Bloods and Crips. Many gangs that belong to the same umbrella gang are hostile to each other and have alliances with gangs of the other umbrella gang.

African-American gangs participate in many of the same activities as the Latino gangs. Fights begin when there is an incident of a "dis," or disrespect, against a gang member by a member of an enemy gang. It seems that the "dis" of the African-American gangs is more insulting to the gang per se, for example, deliberately mispronouncing the name of the gang, than the more personally-based disrespect that usually starts fights among the Latinos. Fights among the African-American gangs include similar elements to the Latino fights, ranging from street fighting with knives and guns to the drive-by shooting.

> You got to claim your neighborhood (a 15-year-old girl).

There seems to be more pressure in the African-American

neighborhoods than in the Latino neighborhoods for adolescents to join a gang (or "set") and then "claim" or identify their set if anyone demands. From various reports, it is difficult for a boy not to make at least a token gesture of membership in a gang. African-American girls seem to be more active in gangs than the Latino girls. Although there is less pressure on girls, even they will be asked to join or at least identify with a set. One girl reported feeling torn between joining a Blood-affiliated gang that many of her friends belong to and joining a Crips affiliated gang that many of her family members belong to.

For boys and girls, joining an African-American gang is similar to the process of joining a Latino gang: new members are "jumped in" and have to demonstrate their courage and valor fighting against several others at once.

> Interviewer: How much money do you make?
> A 14-year-old African-American gang member: I bet I make more than you do.
> Interviewer: I bet you do, too. But how much?
> Youngster: The least I ever made was $400 a day; the most was $1000.

Although some Latino and Asian gangs actively

participate in the distribution of illegal drugs, it is the African-American gangs that are the most active dealers. Profits from these deals seem to provide an additional motivation for the members to join and remain loyal to the gang. The media has widely reported the drug dealing of Los Angeles gangs; other cities are the targets of the eager marketing schemes of the young members. Drug dealing is lucrative, and because the gang members as juveniles do not receive heavy penalties when caught by the police, they are less concerned with such dangers.

> Interviewer: What do you do with all the money?
> A 16-year-old gang member: Party. Buy things. Take out girls. Girls won't go out with you no more unless you buy them (gold) chains and have a nice car.
> Interviewer: How do you buy a car? You're a minor.
> Youngster: Oh, you get an O.G. (Original Gangster: older "retired" gang member) to buy it for you or someone else.

Only one boy reported saving some of the money he made on the drug dealing. This boy gave some of his profits to his older sister (who was also a drug dealer) to bank for him. He twice had the experience of doing time and coming

out of juvenile hall without any start-up capital. At the time of his interview he had $2000 in a savings account so that when he got out he could immediately resume dealing. The others seemed to spend it as fast as they made it, although some reported giving money to parents and other family members as gifts or as contributions to rent or house payments.

> Interviewer: You told me you could get whatever drugs you want. What do <u>you</u> use?
> A 15- year-old gang member: I can't use no drugs, then I'll blow my profits and have nothing. I smoke some weed, that's all.

Statistics from the Juvenile Drug Use Forecasting Project (DUF) which involves the collection of a urine sample which is tested for drugs show low drug use among African-American minors in juvenile hall. (See section on drugs below.) African-American gang members report using marijuana and some PCP, with powder cocaine or crack cocaine used rarely or not at all.

> Interviewer: You have all that crack around and you never smoke any?

> A 16-year-old gang member: I've seen what it does to people. The old guys in the neighborhood, the ones I sell to, they be all strung out on rock (crack) and can't get off it. They don't have no jobs or no cars or no families. I'm not going to end up like that.

Although African-American gang members report selling "whatever you want," the most popular drugs to market are cocaine, marijuana, and some PCP. Most of the gang members interviewed were at the bottom of the distribution pyramid; they received the drugs from other more senior gang members and sold the drugs at the street level, in the neighborhood and in schools. Two of the interviewees sold the drugs at wholesale prices to other gang members who then sold at the street level. None of those interviewed had a perspective on the drug distribution network that went beyond the gang level. The dealers viewed their relationship with their customers in a matter-of-fact way. From the dealers' perspective, the users were making constant decisions about their lives and often those decisions resulted in increased involvement with crack to the point of dysfunctional dependency. The dealers did not feel that their dealing was at all responsible for this dependency. "If they don't buy it from me, they'll just buy it from someone else."

Interviewer: How long do you usually stay in a gang?

A 15-year-old nongang member with close ties to both Crips and Bloods: Usually till you get shot.

Interviewer: Shot and wounded?

Youngster: No, shot and killed.

Membership in an African-American gang usually begins around the age of 12 or 13, coinciding with junior high school, although there have been many reports of members joining as young as 9 or 10. A member is expected to participate in fights, drive-bys, and social events. Drug dealing is reserved for those who have proven themselves and demonstrated loyalty. The high profits of drug dealing make it attractive to members and they are willing to work in peripheral jobs, such as "lookout" or "runner" to become eligible for advancement. Leaving the gang seems to be harder. A girl can stop active participation if she becomes pregnant, although she would be expected to remain a supporter. For boys, there is considerable pressure to remain in the gang until the age of 20 or so. A member who has lasted that long is considered an "O.G." or "original gangster" and is free to pursue other activities while remaining supportive.

> I could go to school and finish school, and then go out and get a job for chump change (a 15-year-old).

African-American gang members have more ambivalent attitudes toward school than the Latino members, who respect school and the potential opportunities that they feel it represents, even if they do not "have time" to attend. For the African-Americans, there is pride in graduating from high school and embarrassment at dropping out. At the same time, they view school as irrelevant to their current lives and too associated with later menial employment to be worth pursuing for the future. Indeed, gang members, especially the drug dealers, operate at a level of sophistication that seems to be far beyond the level of a junior or even senior high school. Drug dealers have to have a high level of ability to be able to buy the drugs in quantity at a wholesale price, break the drugs down into street-level quantities, and sell at a good profit. Those dealers who are high enough in the hierarchy to buy cocaine in powder to be "rocked up" into crack must be able to follow directions and measurements to do this. Dealers work with beepers and cellular phones and must keep appointments and commitments. They have little respect for the lessons taught in school or for a teacher who makes less money than they do.

School's a pretty rough place (a 14-year-old).

The school environment is much more important for gang members for socializing with other "homeys" and for fighting with enemies than for any academic reasons. The Los Angeles Unified School District reported 6,559 crimes on school grounds between January 1 and June 30 of 1990. Corridors, classrooms, and school grounds provide ample opportunity for "dissing" a rival gang member and then fighting over the incident of disrespect. Gang activities take on a central role in school life and, for many, lessons and studies fade into the background. The school provided an arena in which to act out the dangerous rituals of gang banging. Since the rituals gain meaning to the extent that they are performed in public, schools are an ideal place to perform them. Many members are suspended from school for stated periods of time as a disciplinary action and do not return, many are expelled, and others just stop going to school because they are more involved with their gang activities. Ironically, non-school-attending gang members are often found within schools and in the schoolyards to maintain contact with "homeys" and to make drug deals.

2. <u>Young Parents</u>

Interviewer: Do you use any birth control?

A 16-year-old boy: Naw....

Interviewer: Why not?

Youngster: Well, I've been doing it (having sex) for eight months and nobody got pregnant yet.

Another group that is at high risk for dropping out of school or not fully participating in the school experience are young parents. Although mothers most typically undergo major lifestyle changes upon parenthood, some fathers also report that the new responsibility in their lives has made them drop out of school to get a job. About one half of the girls who become pregnant are able to return to the school, the others drop out before or after birth.

Of the adolescents interviewed in juvenile halls (N=438), 86 percent are sexually active; they had at least one sexual partner in the previous year. Only 26 percent report that they are using birth control of any kind. They all had information about birth control and pregnancy but are not translating this into behavior that would prevent pregnancy. Interacting attitudes toward birth control, pregnancy, and parenthood seem to contribute to the teens' behavior, and these attitudes vary somewhat with ethnicity.

Many white teens and some Latino and African-American

teens seem to encapsulate their sexual activity as something apart from the realities of dangers of pregnancy and disease. Sex is something that "just happens"; it is unplanned. Some of the girls feel that planning would spoil the spontaneity of the moment. Carrying around condoms, birth control sponges, or even taking the Pill, are seen as activities that only someone with "sex on her mind" would do. Most girls want to think that they are carried away by the passion of the moment; planning and birth control prevention apparently detract from this desired feeling. Other girls report that they "just don't think about" possible consequences of sexual activity at the time of the sex act, although they may worry about pregnancy later. The sporadic nature of their sexual activity may contribute to the lack of planning. For most, having sex is still a rare-enough event that automatic thinking, planning, and prevention do not occur. A few, like the boy quoted above, are in a stage of denial that probably only a pregnancy would break through.

> I liked him, so I'm having a baby for him (a 16-year-old African-American girl).

Although some African-American adolescents interviewed

have some of the same attitudes toward birth control stated above, most voiced what seems to be a fairly well-entrenched cultural norm for this group regarding birth control, pregnancy, and parenthood. Adolescents and adults viewed birth control as something you might do with "someone else" but not with your primary partner. The women did not present birth control as an issue they were afraid or hesitant to present to their partners, or an issue they had given up on. Rather the women themselves regarded birth control as an unwanted, artificial barrier between themselves and their partners. Only older women who had several children thought in terms of preventing pregnancy. For disease prevention, both the adolescents and the adults felt that they could prevent disease by "knowing who they were sleeping with" or "not going with just anyone," implying a disease model based on lifestyle and physical traits. Other African-American women in this group considered pregnancy a natural by-product of being sexually active. If a woman "liked" a man enough, she would have sex with him and "have a baby for him," even if the relationship was of a short duration. Abortion was never mentioned as an alternative to pregnancy, although many pregnant adolescents do chose to abort.

The young men interviewed shared this perspective and

language: "She's having a baby for me." The men speak of using condoms for birth control and disease prevention if they are having sex outside a primary relationship, but never with a primary partner, even in a short-lasting relationship. "We don't use birth control, 'cause that's my woman."

Similarly, pregnancy and parenthood were seen as inevitable facts of life, not as choices or options. An adult interviewee offered to father a child for an interviewer when he discovered that she had no children; remaining childless, unless there is a physical problem preventing pregnancy, is a cultural aberration. The African-American boys, even one as young as 14, stated that they would "stand by" a young woman who had a child "for" them, although even the concept of "standing by" can have different interpretations. At the minimum, a young man stands by a woman when he acknowledges the child as his. For many, that is the only overt action taken, but several young women seemed to have no problem with this level of fatherhood: "He knows his son is being taken care of." The children are often raised by grandmothers, aunts, and other female family members. Pregnancy and impending parenthood do not seem to motivate marriage. No African-American informant reported getting married as a "solution" and

indeed, pregnancy is not seen as a "problem."

For the African-American teenagers, both males and females, one meaning of parenthood is being part of the natural order of things. For the women, other forces come into play. Many of the African-American young women reported that children were important for them because children provided "someone to love and love me." A child is "something that is my very own," that "nobody can take away from me." Being pregnant and having a new baby provided many young women with a level of attention, respect, and concern from others that was unique in their lives. Most of the women interviewed had abusive relationships in their own childhoods and seemed to embrace the notion of parenthood as a way of lessening their own pain.

The Latino teenagers seem to share some values with the African-American teens. Among the Latinos, birth control is not used or even considered. Relationships are usually serially monogamous, with fewer total sexual partners among Latinos than among the African-American or white teenagers. The average number of sexual partners in the previous year was 6.8 for the African-American teens, 5.2 for the white teenagers, and 4.1 for the Latinos. Although not one of the sexually active Latino teens reported wanting to have a child at the time of interview, preferring to wait until

they are older, they were all having unprotected sex and all stated that if the girl got pregnant they would have the child and probably get married. Even the boys were adamant on this point.

> Interviewer: What if you got a girl pregnant?
> A 14-year-old: I would take care of my responsibilities.
> Interviewer: How would you do that?
> Youngster: I would stay with her and the baby. I would be responsible, you know.
> Interviewer: Would you get married?
> Youngster: Yes, that would be my responsibility.
> Interviewer: What if you didn't love her?
> Youngster: It doesn't matter. You got to take care of things.

Although the Latino young women also view parenthood as an inevitable, natural consequence of life, they do not seem to have the same drive as the African-American women to have a child as a recipient and provider of love. The Latinas are more likely than the African-American women to raise their babies themselves, though they might live with their own parents until they can get their own place. The Latino

fathers forsee an active role in parenthood, even if not living with their children. Most teen fathers start supporting the child or children financially and help to establish a separate home for the family.

Obviously, having a child is the kind of event that leads to dropping out of school. Girls drop out because few schools have special programs allowing young mothers to bring children to school. Many young fathers, especially the Latinos, drop out because they want to work to support their new family. School is seen as something you do when you are a kid, it is not an activity for adults. With the arrival of parenthood, these adolescents take on adult responsibilities and perceive themselves as adults. School does not fit in to this self-perception.

3. Substance-abusing Adolescents

It makes you feel good (a 16-year-old heavy drinker).

Most of the adolescents interviewed and tested for drug use in juvenile halls are not heavy users of drugs. Of a sample of 438 juveniles whose urine was tested for the presence of drugs between spring 1990 and winter 1991, 309 (70.5 percent) were negative for any drug. Eighty juveniles

(18.3 percent) tested positive for marijuana, 47 (10.7 percent) tested positive for cocaine, and 23 (5.3 percent) tested positive for PCP. (However, a urine test can typically detect a substance used in the two or three previous few days). Use of other drugs was low. For example, only 3 juveniles (.7 per cent) were positive for opiates, and 6 (1.4 percent) were positive for amphetamines.

However, 365 of the sample (83.3 percent) reported use of an illicit drug or alcohol at least once in the previous month, undetectable by urinanalysis. Alcohol use was reported by 296 juveniles (67.6 percent) and marijuana by 217 (49.5 percent). Thirty-nine juveniles (8.9 percent) reported cocaine use at least once in the previous month, and 33 (7.5 percent) reported PCP use.

As stated above, many of the adolescents are familiar with the dangers of drug use. They have seen the older people in their neighborhoods lose control of their lives and become dependent on heroin or cocaine. Thus, many of those adolescents who are dealing drugs are careful to avoid using them because they are afraid that their distributors will become aware and stop supplying the drug. They are also aware that they will destroy their profit margins by using.

Other teenagers may be just beginning their drug

careers and have not really escalated into heavy drug use. Many of the drug-dependent adults reported they only began heavy drug use in their late teens. Substance use typically follows a developmental sequence such that those who use cocaine, heroin, or PCP have nearly always begun with cigarettes and alchohol. However, some substances do not lead to others. Marijuana is usually the first illegal drug used, sometimes following experimentation with inhalant sniffing. It is usually only at a later age that some people choose to use other drugs.

Of the juvenile sample, 339 (77.4 percent) reported being dependent on tobacco. Many of those who felt that they were not "dependent" were smoking several times per week and it seems likely that many will eventually become habitual tobacco users.

There are, however, some adolescents who said they have problems with drugs or alcohol and cannot control use. The great majority of them are boys. Thirteen juveniles (3 percent) reported that they are now dependent on alcohol, drinking large quantities of beer at parties and social events. Reports of two or more six-packs per person in an evening are not uncommon. It is interesting to note that 24 juveniles (5.5 percent) reported that they had been dependent on alcohol in the past but were no longer

dependent.

Thirty adolescents (6.8 percent) reported that they were dependent on marijuana in the past and 11 (2.5 percent) report dependency on marijuana at the time of interview. Twelve juveniles (2.7 percent) had been dependent on crack in the past and 11 (2.7 percent) had been dependent on powder cocaine. At the time of interview only 5 (1.1 percent) were dependent on crack and 3 (.7) were dependent on powder cocaine. From these data it seems that some of the drug users are able to recognize a dependency problem and take steps to cease use. Only 27 (6 percent) of the sample reported having been in a treatment program in the past for drug or alcohol use.

The adolescents who reported having problems controlling substance use are often, but not always, members of the other groups described in this chapter--gang participants, teen parents, and adolescents from dysfunctional homes, with overlapping membership among those groups. It is easy to imagine how substance use and its resultant disinhibition would affect and be affected by the activities associated with gangs, with early sexual activity, and with living in a chaotic home environment.

I know I can handle it (alcohol) because I'm a strong

person (a 16-year-old daily drinker).

Other youth who become substance abusers are not always members of the groups mentioned above. For them the substance is an enjoyment and an escape. These adolescents report being too "wasted" to pay attention in class or to do assignments at home. Many of them have no realization that they are dependent on a substance; they insist that they can "take it or leave it" in spite of self-reported daily use of such substances as alcohol or marijuana. Even those who have been through some sort of drug treatment programs show little awareness about substance use and their own dependency. For these young people, dropping out of school does not seem to be a conscious decision; it becomes a decision made by default as they miss more and more school and finally do not go back.

4. Youth from Dysfunctional Homes

It doesn't matter if I do time. Nothing matters because I don't matter (a 14-year-old girl).

Many of the adolescents interviewed in juvenile halls, as well as their adult counterparts in adult jails, have

come from homes that were dysfunctional in some way, and many seem to be old and burned out at the age of 14 or 15. Parents' substance abuse, unstable relationships with stepparents and other caretakers, emotional and physical abuse, and sexual molestation are common themes in the lives of this group of young people, who seem the most troubled of the youth detained in juvenile halls. As a group they are no strangers to the public welfare system; most have dealt with social workers, foster parents, and the police for most of their lives. Not surprisingly, abused adolescents make up a considerable portion of the other categories of at-risk youth: gang members, young parents, and drug abusers. There are other young people who have been abused who appear in juvenile halls for noncriminal charges that are, directly or indirectly, related to their abusive home environments.

> A 23-year-old woman, currently involved with an IV drug user: Starting when I was 15 I had to stay home from school two or three days a week to take care of my sister's boy. Then I got so far behind I just stopped going.
>
> Interviewer: Why didn't your sister or your mother take care of him?
>
> Woman: They were always loaded. Everybody in my

> family is a dope fiend, but me.

Many interviewees grew up in homes that were chaotic and dysfunctional although there was no physical or sexual abuse. Some, like the woman quoted above, became the "caretakers" of the rest of the family. As caretakers they grew up quickly and assumed adult responsibilities for cooking, cleaning, and even intercepting checks in the mail to pay the rent and other bills. Often their mothers would keep an older daughter at home to help out with the younger siblings. Older sons were often recruited to leave school to work in order to help out. Others moved often from one parent's home to another, missing school in the process. Loyalty to the family is deemed of primary importance; actions taken for the benefit of the individual, even going to school, may be seen as "selfish".

> I just don't feel good being around people (a 14-year-old girl who had been repeatedly raped by her grandfather).

A fairly typical course of events for the abused youth interviewed in juvenile halls goes as follows: the abused child goes to school and a teacher or other school worker

notices signs of physical abuse. Similarly, a child's statements may suggest sexual or emotional abuse. The suspected abuse is reported and investigated. If the home situation is extreme and considered dangerous for the child's safety, the child is then taken from the home and put in a foster home or other institutional setting, often at a very young age and with no understanding of the events that have taken place. The child feels punished. At some point, the child may be returned to the home. In some cases, the offending adult, almost always a male caretaker, is no longer in residence or has satisfied the courts by beginning therapy or attending self-help groups. The child's mother is often angry with the child and may accuse the child of perpetrating the incident.

A cycle begins of being sent to foster homes, running away from the foster homes, entering the juvenile court system and going to juvenile halls due to absence from the foster home, going home and being sexually or physically abused again by the male caretaker or emotionally or physically abused by the mother. Once the child has entered the juvenile system, it seems that it is difficult to get out: so many aspects of daily life fall under the juvenile court's jurisdiction. For a minor on probation, one day of missed school or a failure to obey a local curfew is enough

to result in a charge of "Violation of Probation," which then may result in a sentence. The adolescents begin to view their homes, the school and juvenile hall as various aspects of the same punitive institution.

> The only people who care about me are my homeys (a 15-year-old girl).

Many of these abused young people in juvenile hall, who have often done nothing criminal, appear to not comprehend what is happening to them. They report difficulty in maintaining relationships with others. They feel "different" from the other kids at school. They <u>feel</u> guilty even though they <u>know</u> that they have done nothing to perpetrate the abuse. Those who have been sexually abused feel little in common with those their same age, who seem childish and naive.

Abused youth make up a large part of the other risk groups outlined here: gang members, teen parents, and drug abusers. Participation in the activities of these groups seems to be an effort to "fit in" somewhere, to be a part of a social group, to have acceptance and support, psychosocial elements not found within the family unit. The validation provided by fellow gang members, by a lover, or by drinking

and drug-taking buddies makes the abused youth feel good for the first time in their lives. At last they have some people to count on and depend on. If the behavior is illegal and if the participants start getting in trouble with the law and with the authorities, it becomes further evidence that "they," the straight world, are against you and you can not depend on anyone but your group.

Others of the abused do not join these groups or participate in any of their activities. Their response to the chaos and turmoil in their lives has been to turn inward. These youth usually get into trouble because they have had difficulty in a foster home or with a parent; they usually have not done anything criminal. As stated above, once they have entered the juvenile system, it is all too easy to commit infractions that will lead to further infractions. Teenagers of this group who were interviewed in juvenile halls seemed apathetic and withdrawn. Compared to other young interviewees, they offered fewer opinions, were less likely to converse, and seemed less concerned about the dispositions of their cases. Adults fitting this profile who were interviewed in jails and on Skid Row recalled childhoods with a dull bitterness. The hopelessness and powerlessness of those early years seemed to follow them into adulthood. Many men and women had run

away from home; many women had escaped into early marriages; few had finished high school.

Symbolic Meaning of School for At-risk Youth

> I'm still in school. I just have to go back (a 16-year-old boy who had not attended school for two months).

Not attending school, whether as a personal decision, a decision by default, or due to expulsion, is a position that is arrived at by different routes. Almost every dropout interviewed (including self-confessed murderers) seemed embarrassed to admit that he or she no longer attended school, implying a strong value toward finishing, in spite of attitudes and behavior that are contrary. Few of those interviewed, both the adults and the adolescents, reported that they had consciously decided not to return to school. Some had been expelled permanently from school and seemed not to know of or want any alternative sources of education. Some had been suspended for a certain period of time and never went back. The great majority of those adolescents not in school at the time of the interview had stopped attending school for reasons that they could not really

articulate.

The initiation of "nonattendance" often begins after a school vacation or other break in the schedule, perhaps due to illness, injuries or problems in the family. A certain momentum is lost, new habits take over, and school becomes more and more remote. Those who had been not attending for a shorter period of time (less than three months or so) stated with conviction that they were "in school" and would resume attending classes in the near future. When the period of nonattendance was longer than three months or so, adolescents were more apt to recognize that they had, indeed, dropped out of school and be able to say so. Even so, most seem embarrassed and many laughed nervously when discussing not attending school. It is not a subject that is taken lightly. The different groups discussed above have different perspectives and reasons for not attending school. Each will be examined in turn.

1. The gang participants are engaged in life-or-death activities on a day-to-day basis. School attendance will obviously take second place to such urgent events. As stated previously, the Latino gang members have a general respect for education or at least for the employment rewards that an education can bring. They feel that they are burdening themselves by not finishing school, yet their

loyalty to the gang overcomes their feelings of duty toward education. They report that they respect their teachers and feel that the teachers care about them and their welfare.

The African-American gang members seemed less respectful and more cynical of the education process. For them, the only thing school could teach an African-American is how to stay in your place. To go to classes, get a diploma, and then get a job paying "chump change" is to participate in an economic system that was designed to keep them at the bottom, in this view. Teachers are both "chumps," because they work for what is considered to be low pay (teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District average $45,000 per year), and instruments of a system that offers no opportunities to African-Americans.

2. The <u>teen parents</u> drop out for different reasons. Once there is a baby to be cared for, mothers stop attending school to care for their children. Respondents reported that they were not aware of available programs that allow young mothers to bring young children to special school programs. There are such programs at four of the forty-nine high schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District, with a long waiting list for prospective participants. These programs should be expanded so that new mothers in every high school can participate without a waiting period.

An additional factor in school nonattendance for young mothers is the perception that they have crossed a threshold into adulthood with the new responsibilities of motherhood. The school environment is seen as childish, and the concerns seem not worthy of the new grown-up world they have entered.

This perception of school as being too "childish" holds true for the fathers, too. Even those fathers not actively participating in the raising or financial support of their children feel that they have changed to a new status with fatherhood. Fathers who are taking on a parenting role usually begin working in order to make a financial contribution to the new family.

3. Youth who are <u>abusing alcohol and drugs</u> begin to see the school environment as hostile and the teacher as the enemy. For many of those interviewed, performance began to decline as they began abusing substances. When teachers noted changes in performance and behavior, the youth began trying to hide their condition by trying to be "invisible" within the classroom or by skipping school entirely. They start to see teachers as the police, ready to "bust" them for being under the influence. A pattern begins to emerge of drinking and/or using drugs, then not going to school so as not to be detected, then consuming more substances while not going to school.

Substance-abusing adolescents interviewed, like members of the other categories discussed, seem to get out of the "habit" of going to school if they do not attend for any reason, be it self-initiated ditching or school-initiated suspension. Nonattendance breeds nonattendance, and the teens spend a period of time while not attending school in denial about the fact that they are dropping out or have dropped out of school. Young substance abusers are also slow to recognize that they are unable to control their use of drugs and alcohol. They begin to participate in a culture of substance use that becomes more compelling than the culture of the school environment.

4. Young people <u>from abusive families</u> have their own reasons for not attending school. They often feel a sense of shame (unwarranted, of course) when they are in contact with other people. For those who come from chaotic environments in which substances are being abused and where there is a lot of unpredictability and uncontrollability, it is difficult to plan ahead, do homework, study or even relax. The home environment makes it hard to perform well and makes the young people from such an environment feel different from the other students. Those who have been physically, verbally and/or emotionally abused often begin to believe the messages that are repeatedly imparted to

them. They start feeling that they are worthless because this is what they are told.

Adolescents who have been sexually abused, especially when the abuse has been incest, have a hard time making sense of the world. They feel shame and guilt for what has been done to them, and they do not want to be around the other students. Additionally, those who have been sexually abused feel a level of maturity beyond their years; they feel that the other students are still children and engaged in childish activities. It is often difficult for sexually abused young people to date or have close personal relationships with others their own age. Many girls who have been abused begin to seek out the company of older men who "know what it's all about." Presumably they feel more comfortable with men who are sexually knowledgeable.

Addressing Students' Needs and Respecting their Values

The different types of at-risk youth discussed here have different needs at different levels of potential intervention. Many of the problems arise at the level of macro-economics. It is well known that to address these problems we need a determined collective will, cohesive planning, and substantial resources to provide alternatives for these young people. At a cost/benefit level of

analysis, many of them will be using public resources in juvenile halls, jails, drug treatment, and other programs for many years. At a more humanistic level of analysis, they have been denied their part of the American dream by not being allowed the resources to grow to their full potential.

The gang members are one group that demand intervention strategies at a societal level. Society is perceived as dysfunctional by these young men and women. From a position of extreme alienation from the dominant society, they have created societies of their own, with their own norms and values. But the gang societies have become deadly business for gang participants and others who live in their neighborhoods. Members have forged new identities based on stereotypes of their own gang and the rival gangs. They need to learn how to have a more positive identity and how to express this identity without negatively stereotyping other groups. Latino gang members need to be able to retain their strong sense of honor and respect, but to express these values in ways that are more pro-social. The African-American gang members are also denied positive outlets for feelings of honor and loyalty. They, too, need to feel that they can work within the society in ways that are not demeaning to their personal sense of worth.

Both groups of gang members need to change their norms with respect to violence, especially killing. Adult drug users interviewed recall that, when they were young and in gangs, homicide was a very rare event. While fights were common, they rarely culminated in killing. Now death has become the norm. As difficult as it is to change subgroup norms, it is not impossible. The use of peer outreach workers has succeeded in changing the norms of needle-sharing and needle-cleaning among IV drug users in many countries around the world. Similar programs aimed at gang participants could save lives by using peers to encourage a de-escalation of violence. Use of a mentoring system involving ex-gang members and others from the community would provide positive roles for the gang members.

Teen sexuality is another area in which personal values need to be addressed. The fact that adolescents seem to know about birth control and about HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs), yet choose not to do anything about it is a sign that education has not affected the behavioral level. As long as there is a norm that condoms, if used at all, are used with someone "on the side," not with a main boyfriend or girlfriend, there will be unwanted pregnancies and STD transmission. And, as long as teens feel that they need to have a baby in order to have

someone to love and to love them, they will never attempt family planning. Use of peers and role models from the community, along with discussion and support groups with the adolescents could help change these norms.

Obviously, once a young woman has become a mother, everything possible should be done to encourage her to stay in school. The long waiting list to enter the Los Angeles School District program that allows mothers to bring children to school can discourage a young woman from attending school. A woman, who may be a single parent, without a high school education is probably going to remain close to the poverty level and may even need government assistance. Money spent to allow her to finish her education will most certainly save money in the future.

Youth who are abusing drugs and alcohol need better, more realistic drug and alcohol information before they get to the age of experimentation. Currently, drug education programs do not always address use of legal drugs; the programs equate the effects of marijuana with the effects of drugs like heroin and cocaine. Although some users of marijuana become dependent on the drug, it is not comparable to cocaine and heroin in producing dependency. Credibility is lost when young people who have already experimented with marijuana are told that it is as dangerous and addicting a

drug as these. They then tend not to believe the messages about the more dependency-producing drugs. Grounded education on licit and illicit drug effedcts and recognizing dependency in oneself and in others could help to break through the denial of many young users.

Norms need to be changed making it not acceptable to use substances to the point of losing control. Adolescents are drinking alcohol without any role models or information on how to drink. They drink "to get drunk." Once a young person has become dependent on alcohol or other drugs, on-going programs are needed to cushion the person through the adolescent years. Again, money spent at this point could save many thousands of dollars per person in the future.

> I know I'm doing to my daughter just what they did to me, but I can't help myself (a 23-year-old abusive mother from an abusive family).

The cycle of abuse is perhaps the most dramatic example of the recurrent nature of problems that will not "just go away" and that will come back to haunt children and drain society. Child abuse is an expression of frustration, rage and powerlessness on the part of the abuser, who was often

abused as a child. As a society we have begun to break through the walls of denial, but we are still intervening on an ad hoc, case by case basis and not addressing the larger societal problems of unemployment, poverty, and lack of hope that lead to such high levels of abuse-producing stress.

One program aimed at primary prevention of child abuse in Los Angeles is the Child Abuse Recognition and Elimination (C.A.R.E.) program, which is administered by the school district. C.A.R.E. provides 40 hours of training to a multidisciplinary team at elementary schools who elect to join the project. Members of the trained team are available for intervention if child abuse is identified. Parents participate in parenting workshops, there are safety lessons for the children, and the children are tracked as long as they remain in the school district. The number of second and third reports of abuse for the same child has declined in schools that participate in C.A.R.E. It is just this kind of cooperative effort that can make a difference for a family and for the community. Unfortunately, because the state contribution to this program was eliminated, staffing was reduced drastically and the C.A.R.E program is not in place in every elementary school.

Sex education and birth control information would help to make every child a wanted child. Many of the adolescents

in this sample were having unprotected sex with no thought for the long-term consequences of pregnancy or possible diseases.

Parenting classes and support groups for every new parent would help the teen learn how to nurture and discipline their children, rather than to fall back on the often abusive parenting styles they themselves endured. Improvements in the foster care system are needed to make a foster home a safe place, not one from which to run away.

I have tried to let the people I interviewed speak for themselves. As a social psychologist with no background in urban planning or economics, I hesitate to recommend policy for addressing these social problems and, in many ways, the problems discussed here are far beyond the scope of school programs. Dealing with alienation from school can only succeed when students and their parents feel less alienated from the dominant society. How to accomplish this goal has been a social policy and research focus for many years. Unfortunately, the knowledge gained is often ignored or lost in successive government administrations.

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